



YALI Network

Biography Questionnaire

The following questions will help you get started creating your biography. Think through which answers will allow you to tell your story in a brief, engaging way; do not feel the need to use every piece of information. Be sure to review the example biographies at the end of this document for additional guidelines. If you need more information, check out the YALI Network blog (yali.state.gov/resources/blog) for additional professional writing advice.

1. Basics

Name (first and last)

Residence (country, city or town)

Education (level and school)

Current employer or school

Current job title or field of study

Past employers, if relevant

Years of experience

2. Accomplishments and Leadership

What are you passionate about?

How are you pursuing this passion?

What is your greatest accomplishment?

What did you do?

Why?

What was the impact?

Have you held any leadership positions?

If so, what was your role?

What was your impact in that role?

3. Interests and Personality

What do you enjoy doing in your free time?

Do you belong to any groups/clubs?

Do you volunteer? If so, what do you do and what is your impact?

Are there other ways you are active in your community?

Do you have any unique skills or talents?

How do you use them to make a difference?

4. Goals and Aspirations

What are your personal and professional goals?

How are you going to achieve these goals?

Example Biographies

A biography is your opportunity to showcase your unique story. It can be difficult to summarize all of your experiences into one paragraph and not sound like you copied your resume. To keep your bio focused and unique as well as catch the reader's attention, you should focus on one or two accomplishments and/or passions. Below are examples of a good, impactful bio statement and a biography that could use improvement.

Good Example

"Nadine Ogoumi is the founder and owner of Fundamental Food, a restaurant and cooking school in Cameroon. She is also passionate about helping girls from low-income families. Growing up in a low-income family herself, Nadine learned how to cook from her grandmother. At the age of 10, she was able to apply these skills working in the kitchen of a local restaurant to help earn money for her family. Nadine later perfected her cooking skills and earned a degree at the Institute of Culinary Arts in South Africa. She returned to her community and opened Fundamental Food, where she teaches young women in her community cooking, hospitality, and entrepreneurial skills. As a way for the girls to apply their skills, Nadine opened a small restaurant that is run by her students. Over the course of 10 years, through Fundamental Food, Nadine has helped more than 100 women go to culinary school, open restaurants, and create their own cooking-related community development projects. This winter, Nadine will be opening a second restaurant and cooking school with ten of her former students."

Great start! She introduces herself in the third person and lists her profession and her biggest accomplishment.

Nadine provides specifics about her achievements, which help provide context to her biography.

Nadine states her goals for the future and uses specifics.

Can be Improved

"I am 26 and from Cameroon. I have graduated from university with a degree in management. I am an active volunteer, the director of my church choir, currently running for city council and am the founder and owner of Fundamental Food, a restaurant and cooking school. Fundamental Food offers women from low-income families free cooking and restaurant management classes. They also run the restaurant. Before starting Fundamental Food, I received an informal cooking education from my grandmother and a formal degree from the Institute of Culinary Arts in South Africa. I am passionate about women's rights. I plan to open a second school and restaurant in the future."

— Nadine never provides her name! Also, she uses first person when third person is better.

— Nadine lists her accomplishments instead of going into specifics about one or two of them.

— While it is great that Nadine listed her plans for the future, they are vague and could be more concrete.